

A
DISCOURSE
ON THE
NATIVITY
Jesus Christ
OF OUR
LORD.



LIMERICK: M,DCC,LXXV.

Printed by Thomas Welch

1775



THIS Discourse was not intended for publication: but some Friends having represented to the Author, that, as the Subject was of a general Nature, and suited to the present Time, it might meet with a favourable Reception, he has ventured to publish it.

HOW little do we think, poor Mortals! absorbed in the Business and hurry of Life, or carried incessantly about in a giddy Circle of Dissipations, we can attend to nothing but the present Scene of Noise and Distraction. Every Thing out of this, every Thing above it, lies unheeded, or forgotten. Mean while the Source of Mercy is incessantly flowing upon us, and the LORD's most gracious Design's invariably the same.

IF any thing Thing could effectually call forth our Attention, it should seem to be this of the SON of GOD's *Incarnation*, and blessed *Nativity*: for here it is, that he displays all his Glory. "The WORD, says St. *John*, was made *Flesh*, "and dwelt among us, and we beheld his Glory: "Glory, as of the ONLY-BEGOTTEN of the FA-

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“ **THER**, full of **Grace** and **Truth** *”. What can be more interesting, than this Introduction to the History of the **SAVIOUR**’s Life? or who could better express the Wonders of his mortal Peregrination, than that privileged and beloved Disciple, who leant upon his sacred Breast at the last Supper, and thence drew the Source of all his Knowledge?

THE Nature of the **SON** of **GOD**’s eternal Generation in the Bosom of the **FATHER** is, indeed, above all Comprehension: for, “ who,” says the Prophet *Isaiab*, “ shall declare his Generation †?” His Conception, as Man, and his Birth of a pure Virgin, is also a great Mystery: the Union of both Natures, the Divine and the Human, in one **PERSON**, is not less astonishing. Let us respect, but not presume too curiously to investigate those Mysteries of our Faith. But it is edifying, and it must be useful, to enquire into the Motives that induced the **SON** of **GOD** to take our Nature upon him. And these, I think, are clearly expressed in the Words of St. *John* above quoted.

“ **WE** beheld his Glory,” says this beloved Disciple, “ Glory, as of the **ONLY** **BEGOTTEN** of the “ **FATHER**, full of **Grace** and **Truth**.” Is it not clear from this Passage, that *Grace* and *Truth* were the Motives of his *Incarnation*? or in other Words, that those two Attributes are the Sources,
to

* *John*. I. 14.

† *Isai*. LIII. 3.

to which we must particularly refer the stupendous Work of our Redemption?

BUT what are those Attributes of *Grace* and *Truth* in JESUS CHRIST? for they are two distinct Principles, and of a very different tendency, which none but GOD, and his SON could reconcile.

GRACE, in GOD, is the Source of Goodness, Meekness, Patience, Benignity, and Mercy. This it was that first induced him to create the World, and still engages his Omnipotence to “make his Sun rise alike upon the Just and the Unjust* :” this, that induced him to promise a REDEEMER at the Fall of Man†; to forbear with the Wickedness of Men until the Flood; to raise up *Abraham* to be the Father of his chosen People; to deliver this People from the Slavery of *Egypt*, and settle them in the promised Land; to make them the Depositories of his Divine Law; to support them for so many Ages amid the Hatred and Persecution of so many powerful Princes, that surrounded their little State, notwithstanding their repeated Crimes and Offences; in a Word; that induced him to choose a VIRGIN of their Nation to be the Mother of his beloved SON, and this only Begotten of the FATHER to become our SAVIOUR and DELIVERER; that is to descend from his Throne, and “make no-
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* *Matt.* V. 45.

† *Gen.* III. 15.

“ thing of himself,” in order to save, and exalt Mankind.

HE was “ full of Grace.” How magnificent this Eulogium ! “ And we beheld his Glory :” How rapturous, and expressive of the Admiration that had seized the Breast of this Disciple, who was Eye-witness, to the last, of his Divine Master’s Comportment ! The indiscriminate Use of the Words *Glory* and *Grace*, is here also admirable, and worthy of particular Attention.

GLORY, and GRACE in the general Language of the Scriptures, import two different Ideas : By the first is generally meant the Beatitude, which God bestows in Heaven on his Elect, or the Happiness, which he possesses eternally in himself : by the second, the sweet and ineffable Means he ministers unto Souls to help them to attain that Bliss. But in this Place St. *John* employs them as synonymous Terms, and sees no Distinction between the *Grace* and *Glory* of the SON of GOD. He is so enraptured with the Goodness and Benignity, which the SAVIOUR manifested here upon Earth, that he calls it by the proper Name of *Glory* : with him it is the same as Beatitude, and seeing GOD himself *Face to Face*.---There must be something in this Work of Mercy, that transcends all human Conception, and which we have never yet, perhaps, sufficiently considered.

YES truly, in this great Mystery every
Thing

Thing is Divine; and the Goodness and Benignity of the SAVIOUR is infinite, and incomprehensible. The Observation which I am going to make, will evince this Truth.

THERE appeared two Things in Man, which should seem to render the *Incarnation* impossible, or to use a softer Term, impracticable to God. In the first Place, Man was then in a state of Guilt and Disgrace with his Lord and Creator: and 2^o. Human Nature was in itself infinitely beneath the Dignity of the GODHEAD, and subject to weaknesses, and imperfections, which could never find Place in God. How then could the Son of God think to unite himself to this unworthy Nature? purest Innocence to the vilest Guilt? and sovereign Perfection and Greatness, to disgrace and imperfection? ah, there is the Knot; there is the Mystery of the *Incarnation*!

WE may conceive in some sort, how the LORD created all Things of nothing; how the Planets roll in order and succession; how the Seeds of the Earth warmed and fermented by the Rays of the Sun shoot up, and produce Fruits and Flowers. But how the LORD of Hosts, who is thrice HOLY, should unite himself to Guilt? how the Source of Perfection, and Greatness far beyond the Limits of this World, should incorporate with a Compound of Meanness and Imperfection, such as Man? this is a Thing, which we must confess, transcends our Comprehension.

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It is true, God could, and did in fact take upon him our Nature without its sinfulness and Guilt : but then in taking upon him the *Form* of Man, he must have also put on the appearance, at least, of Guilt, and of the common Condition of Men. And how inconsistent must this appear with that sovereign Sanctity of Nature, which in him must necessarily exclude, and disclaim the slightest Shadow of Guilt !

BUT what is impossible, or incomprehensible to Man, is, we find, possible to God ; and in this Instance his Goodness hath reduced it manifestly to Practice. O, the Grace and Goodness of our LORD and SAVIOUR ! “ Who, when he was “ in the Form of GOD,” as St. *Paul* speaks, “ did “ not think it robbery to be equal to GOD ; but “ he made nothing of himself, taking upon him “ the Form of Servant, and in likeness being “ found as Man.”* *He made nothing of himself,* in condescending to take our abject Nature upon him : *He made nothing of himself, being found in likeness as Man,* and condescending to undergo the Note and Imputation of that general Guilt, in which all Mankind. beside, was involved : *He made nothing of himself,* in submitting, though free from all stain of Sin, to all the Punishment of Sin upon Earth, to Hunger, Thirst, Fatigue, Want, Persecution, and Death.

I here pass by all the less considerable Imperfections of our Nature, which he also assumed,
to

* *Phil.* II. 6. 7.

to insist particularly on that Appearance of Sin and Guilt, which is annexed to the general Condition of Men, but is so opposite, so irreconcilable to the Nature of God.

And my God ! how did he reconcile those Extremes ? how ! by an Effect of that same Grace, and Goodness, which accompanied, and characterized all his Actions : he reconciled them in Time, and after a long forbearance, by the Splendor of his Miracles, and the manifestation of that Power, which he held in proper, and to which all the Powers of Nature yielded, and gave Way. But the Exertion of this Power was not to take Place until a certain Period of his Life ; for in the beginning, if we except the Revelation made to the *Shepherds*, to whom the *Angel* appeared, and to the *Kings* who were guided by the *Star*, and a few other privileged Souls, the common Opinion concerning his Origin was, that he was the Son of *Joseph*, that his Father was but Man, and consequently that he was born in original Sin, and had contracted at least that Stain, which *Adam's* disobedience had drawn upon the whole Race of Man. He condescended to lye under this Imputation for a long Time : and seeing him daily work in his supposed Father's Shop, each one must have said---this young Man's Obedience and Humility is indeed great, and admirable ; there is something wonderful in his Life ; but after all, he is but the Son of *Joseph*, born in Sin like the other Children of

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Men, and like them subject to all its degrading Consequences. The God of Innocence, and Sanctity, the HOLY of HOLIES, did, I say, for a long Time put up with this Imputation, so injurious to his blessed Character: he suffered himself soon after his Birth to be presented in the Temple, and like other Sinners *circumcized*; he suffered his blessed Mother to undergo, like other sinful Women, the humiliating Ceremony of *Purification*; and lastly he suffered himself to be baptized by the Hands of *John the Baptist*, as if he wanted Baptism, or Expiation.

BUT the Time was to come, when he would publicly challenge the World “to accuse him of Sin,”* if they could; when by the extraordinary Sanctity of his Life and Doctrine he would put all his Enemies to Shame, and by the Splendor of his Miracles astonish, and silence the whole Earth. Thus would he in due Time reconcile all those Difficulties and Extremes; for he who had in himself the Power of forgiving and cleansing of Sin, could not be a Sinner; and he who could live so pure a Life, and Work such extraordinary Miracles, must be more than Man, that is, God.

BUT he waited this Period with that Patience, and extreme Goodness, which was peculiar to himself; and to the stated Time of manifesting his

* *John*. VIII. 46.

his own true Character, and Greatness, he was satisfied for the sake of Man, "to take upon him" the Form of Slave, and to be found in likeness "as Man," that is, even sinful, *guilty* Man.

JOIN me here, Christian, in a short Reflection. What is the Virtue of the very best of us, in reality? If we aspire to any Degree of Merit, are we not desirous at the same Time, that our little Merit should be known? Are we not offended, that it should be doubted of, or brought in question? Do we not consider the slightest Breath of Calumny, or misrepresentation, as a grievous Injury? Yes. But then all human Virtue is infinitely distant from that perfection of Grace, which shone forth in the SAVIOUR: and all the Virtue possible in Man had been inadequate to the work of our *Redemption*.

BUT on the other Hand we must observe, that there was no positive Act of the SAVIOUR's, that could be denominated *Sinful*. He did not take upon him the appearance of *Sin*, but in a general Sense, and as it was inseparable from the general Condition of that Humanity, which he had assumed, and the Respect which he would still pay to the LAW, until its full Accomplishment by his Death. He did not take it upon him to patronize *Sin*, or that neglect of Virtue and Perfection, which is so fatal to the Soul, but purely to instruct and comfort Sinners; to teach them true Humility, and shew by his

own divine Example, that the first Step to Virtue is a sincere and profound Humility. But that Soul is undone, that proudly makes a shew of, or glories in Sin.

TRUE Virtue will never refuse Humiliation: but to seek it! to embrace it! to disregard the favourable Opinion of Men! to endure their Censure, however wrong and injurious! to hold on this Course of Magnimity, and Sufferance, from the pure Motive of Benevolence, and Charity, supported singly by the Testimony of conscious Innocence and Grace! This was the singular Merit of the SAVIOUR, who was born for us at this Time, and what St. *John* so justly calls his *Glory*.

LONG before this blessed Period, a Philosopher * had said, that “ as the most wicked of Men was he, who should so conceal and cover his Profligacy as to obtain even the Reputation and Rewards of Virtue in this Life; so the most worthy and virtuous of all Men should indubitably be that, who supported by the sole Testimony of his own Conscience, and the rectitude of his Intentions, should discover such superiority of Merit, as to draw upon him the Jealousy, the Obloquy, and Hatred of the rest of Men; and (the Philosopher carried his Remark still farther) their relentless Persecution even to the Death of the Cross.” Are not these the general outlines

* *Socrates apud Platon. Dial. II. De Re—*

outlines of the SAVIOUR'S Character? Is not this a lively Portrait of him? And must not we think, that God had put this admirable Idea of Virtue in the Philosopher's Mind, purely to realize it, afterwards, in the Person of his Son? The SAVIOUR had laid the Foundation of all his Merit and Glory in the Humility of his first Appearance, and that greatness of Soul, which induced him for our Sake to take upon him even the Likeness of Sinner.

THUS far do we see him, according to the Words of St. *John*, " Full of Grace." But he was also " Full of Truth." The second Motive of his *Incarnation*, and the second Characteristic of his Greatness.

WHAT is *Truth*? It is, in the strictest and plainest Sense, Conformity to Justice, Conformity to Reason.--- This is the great and important Principle, which the Son of God came to renew in the Hearts of Man, and establish for ever on its own true and immovable Basis.

THE World had deviated in a strange and fatal manner both from Truth and Justice; and what was equally lamentable, it was no longer in the Power of human Wisdom, or human Virtue to bring *Truth* back to its original and genuine Standard. Error had taken Possession of the Understandings of Men, and overcast the brightest

est Geniusses : Corruption had seized the Heart, and degraded its best Feelings. We need not here enumerate the Errors of the Philosophers, their perplexities and contradictions ; nor damp the Joy of this holy Solemnity by a melancholy retrospection to the Wickedness and Profaneness, that prevailed in the Heathen World at the coming of our Blessed SAVIOUR. God grant, that we be not falling back into the same Profaneness ! If not already half down the Precipice, we are most certainly at the very Brink of it. For, how few, how very few, who have any Spark of Principle remaining ! How few, who have any feelings of Virtue ! But God is still merciful ; his Grace is still all-powerful. Oh, may we deserve to make a proper Use of it !

THE Divine SAVIOUR came then to re-establish the Reign of TRUTH upon Earth ; and he did re-establish it at the expence of his Blood, and of his own Quiet and Happiness. Truth and Justice were the Objects he had always in View ; he knew no Friends but the Friends of Truth, no Enemies but those of Justice ; and this was his Glory.

ONCE more, what is TRUTH ? I fear we shall be scarce able to stand its Presence ; I know we shall be never able to comprehend the full extent of its Meaning. But we must labour to make ourselves more worthy of it, and if we cannot perfectly comprehend, to reverence at least

least, and respect it. And we have this Consolation, that if we cannot look Divine Truth in the Face, considered in its own sublime and awful Nature, we have access to it in the Person of our gracious REDEEMER, clad, as he now is, in the Rays of Humanity, and kindly inviting All to his Presence.----Come then, he seems to say, yet in the Arms of his blessed Mother; come, faithful Soul! and I will Instruct you in the Mysteries of Truth: I will make it familiar to you, and shew you all its Loveliness. To you it should appear armed with Terrors: but I have tempered its Severity, and softened all its Rigours. The Debt you owed, was immense; which, neither your Existence could have paid, nor your Ruin have satisfied. Behold me now in your Place, to answer the demands of Truth! Let eternal JUSTICE vindicate all her Rights, and urge her Demands with all the necessary Rigour, and Exactness: I am at hand to answer, and fully satisfy her. Truth! eternal, sovereign Truth! Dost thou yet comprehend the full Meaning of this Word? Truth! Order! Right! Justice! in a Word, the Will of my FATHER! It hath been violated upon Earth; it hath been outraged; it hath been neglected, and forgotten. But how could it be repaired?---the World, and the whole Race of Man was “ as nothing is in Sight :” * And: “ they are corrupt, and become “ abominable in their Ways; they are *all* gone “ aside; they are become unprofitable together : “ there

* *Psalms*. XXXVIII. 6.

“ there is *none*, that doth good ; no, *not one*.*”
 But his SON ! his beloved SON ! his only Begotten
 of Eternity, *in whom he is well pleased* ! Behold him
 here before you ! in the humble Rays of Mor-
 tality ; in the *likeness of Man* ; in the tender
 state of an Infant ! Raise up now your Head :
 Lift up those down-cast Eyes, and fix them
 boldly upon me. I am that REDEEMER which
 you stood so much in need of : I am the Victim,
 which is to be offered for you : and shall I tell you
 all ? I am that very *Truth*, which you have of-
 fended ; that eternal *Justice*, which you have
 provoked : but *Truth* reconciled by *Grace*, and
 and *Justice* appeased by *Mercy*.----

THE unfolding of this gracious Mystery will at
 once give us an Idea of the true Character of the
 SAVIOUR, and a feeling of that Joy, which his
 Nativity brought to the whole Earth. We are
 here therefore to remark, 1^o : the Nature and
 the Weight of that Debt, which we owed to the
 Divine *Justice* ; and 2^o : our own insufficiency,
 and absolute inability to answer the Demand.

How alarming must this Account appear,
 when we view it with the Eyes of Faith !
 Man, indebted to his Creator for his *Being* ;
 (what an Obligation were this alone !) indebted
 for his *Sanctification*, and establishment in *Grace*
 with all its concomitant Gifts and Privileges ;
 indebted for his Elevation to a State of future
 and eternal *Bliss* ! All this from no pre-existing
 Merit,

* Psalm XIII. 1. 3.

Merit, from nothing on his Part, absolute nothing! This same Man on a sudden forgetting all his Obligations to God, and become ungrateful! His Posterity, thus vitiated in its very Source, multiplying and extending beyond Measure the Guilt inherited of their criminal first Parent! All become *abominable* and *unprofitable* in the sight of their CREATOR: *Not one, to do good, or any Thing meritorious of Reconciliation, or the Divine Acceptance; no, not one!* “The LORD looking down from Heaven upon the Children of Men, to see if there be any, that understand, and seek God,” * and yet not finding *one*! The Picture is too strong for mortal View: too full of Terrors for mortal Weakness.---Not that we must conclude, because human Nature was involved in this general Disgrace, that therefore every Act of the human Will was criminal and sinful. Man was still capable of moral Virtues, which entitled him to adequate Rewards in the Line of Nature: and we have the Authority of St. *Augustin* for saying, that in the ordinary course of Providence the *Romans* merited, by their moral Virtues, the Empire of the World. † But what manifestly appears from the whole Tenor of Holy Writ, is, that Mankind was become so far *abominable*, and *unprofitable* in the sight of God, that no possible Act of the human Will could merit our Reconciliation with Heaven, or Acceptance unto Salvation. Where should Man have recourse to in this desperate Situation? or

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* *Ibid.*

† De Civ. Dei. L. V. C. XII: et XV.

what Resource was left him for the recovery of original Grace, and the Restoration of his primitive Dignity? But what was still an Aggravation of Misery to wretched Man; he was for the most Part ignorant of his Degradation, and knew neither his true Origin, nor the Design of his Being.

IN these Circumstances, what Power less, than that of God himself, was equal to the Task of his Reconciliation? The *Angelic* Nature was inferior to it. An adequate Satisfaction could not come from any created Being. And yet the *Truth* and *Justice* of GOD required this Satisfaction. When behold! the ONLY-BEGOTTEN of the FATHER steps forth: "In the Head of the Book," says he, "it is written of ME, that I should do thy Will. Sacrifice (of the LAW) and Oblation thou wouldst not. Burnt-Offering, and Sin-Offering thou wouldst not. But thou hast fitted for ME a Body. Behold! I come."* Could Heaven refuse any Thing to this BELOVED of the FATHER? His Actions were all Divine, and stamped with the Seal of the DIVINITY. Every Act of his Will, each Thought, each Prayer, and Tear, was of infinite Value. The Debt, he took upon him, was indeed immense; but the Ransom, he brought, was still greater. *Justice*, the Divine *Justice* itself, must be then satisfied; and *Truth*, eternal *Truth* itself, must be reconciled. He comes: he is born in *Bethlehem*: he finds

* *Psal.* XXXIX. 7. 8. 9.

finds not a place, *where he may lay his Head** and the great Work of our Reconciliation is, as to its Substance, accomplished.

ALLUSIVE to this most happy, and auspicious Birth, was that significative Vision of the Royal Prophet, when he saw *Mercy*, and *Truth* meet each other, and *Justice* and *Peace* embrace. *Mercy* we have already seen always inclining towards *Man* : but *Truth* was still averse to him. *Justice* was his Enemy ; and *Peace* durst not approach her Seat. But at the Birth of this Divine Infant all Things change, and take an unexpected turn : the Powers of *Heaven* are in motion : they meet : they embrace : and all is Peace and Joy. “ *Mercy*, and *Truth* met each other, and “ *Justice* and *Peace* have kissed.” †

CONSEQUENT to this Peace, in Heaven, was that established on Earth by this most auspicious Event. Its first Fruits, with regard to *Man*, was his Peace with God. The most desirable, surely, of all Blessings ! for if we are so miserable and unhappy at the length and delay of this our Peregrination upon Earth from God, what Horrors must accompany the Thought of being separated from him for ever ! Which without this Peace, must have been our eternal Portion.

PEACE with *Man*'s Self was the next. O Man ! how thou must be for ever in Enmity with thyself, without this Peace with God ! Thou wouldst be Happy : but thou couldst never attain Hap-

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* Matt. VIII. 11.

† Psal. LXXXIV. 2.

pinefs, not knowing where to find it. Thou mighteft feek it in *thyfelf*: but thy Interior *answers* nothing but *Death* *. Thou mighteft feek it in *external* Things: but God hath defignedly ftamped them all with a Character of faintnefs, infipidity, and uncertainty, which muft difguft and revolt thee. CHRIST, yet in the Arms of his Blessed Mother, brings that Peace, which the World could not bring; and reconciles thee to thyfelf, by reconciling thee to God.

THE laft blessed Fruits of this Peace with God, is Peace with each other, Peace with all Men. And, indeed, when the Powers of Heaven, when the Attributes of God himfelf were all reconciled by the Peace, which the SAVIOUR brought along with him, how could Men refuse to give up thofe little Interests and Paflions, that held them at variance, and alienated them fo long from each other? In fact, from this happy Moment we have learned, that we are all Brethren, and Children of the fame Family; that we have all one common Father, and that our Interests are in reality the fame. The SAVIOUR was pleafed to give us a ftriking Figure of this Peace, which he came to eftablifh in our Hearts, by that general and univerfal Peace which appeared over the World at the Time of his *Nativity*, when the Tumults of War were every where fubfided, and *Cæfar Auguftus* was acknowledged by all Parties fole Master of the Roman Empire. Yes, Divine SAVIOUR! thy blessed Coming required an univerfal

* II. Cor. i. 9.

versal and solid Peace; Peace among the Princes and Lords of the Earth, and Peace among all Men. Hence that universal Benevolence, with which thou didst immediately inspire the Hearts of thy faithful Believers! Hence that blessed Spirit of Forgiveness, that every where took Place! Hence that Love of their Neighbour, and that heavenly Charity, which made them *All Things to All*, and engaged them to sacrifice every Thing, that was dear to them in this Life, to the Good and Salvation of Mankind.

BEHOLD now in a little Time dispelled the Darkness and Clouds, that had so long hung over the human Mind! Its Uncertainties fixed! Its Perplexities removed! The true Origin, and Design of our Being, ascertained! Idolatry, and that impious Worship of profane Divinities, which had spread over the Face of the Earth, abolished! The Worship of the *only* true God, in the Spirit of Love, Simplicity, and Truth, established on the Ruins of Superstition and Impiety! All the Virtues, that dignify human Nature, and prepare us for the Mansions of the *Blessed*, springing up as out of the Bosom of another *Paradise*, and sanctifying the Earth; Benevolence, Fortitude, Meekness, Longanimity, Chastity! The Grace of JESUS CHRIST shedding its blessed Influence on all the Nations of the World, without distinction of *Jew* or *Gentile*, *Greek* or *Barbarian*! Behold here, I say, the glorious Fruits of that *Peace*, which the SON of God brought upon his Wings,

Wings, and which so strongly characterizes his Reign, that Reign of *Truth*, which shall endure for ever: for “ he (the FATHER) gave him “ Power, and Glory, and a Kingdom: and *all* “ People, and Tribes, and Tongues shall serve “ him: his Power is an everlasting Power, that “ shall not be taken away; and his Kingdom, “ that shall not be destroyed.*”

BUT why did he not come sooner to manifest his Glory, and rescue Mankind from Misery, and Error? But “ who,” says the *Apostle*, “ hath “ known the Mind of the LORD? or who hath “ been his Counsellor †?” A REDEEMER was *promised*, when nothing could be expected but endless Disgrace: He was *desired*, and ardently *wished for*, when Mankind were sufficiently convinced of the Necessity of Assistance from *On High*, and of their own utter inability to deliver themselves from Corruption. What but a long experience of their own Misery could have convinced them of the general Corruption of human Nature, and the dreadful Wound it had received at the *Fall*? For, such the Complexion of our degenerate Nature! We can never be made duly sensible, and attentive to any Conviction, but by some practical Feeling, some experimental Impression. Philosophy, and human Wisdom had exhausted all its Resources for the Reformation of *Man*. But every Expedient proved fruitless and ineffectual: or rather, the Expedients,

* *Daniel*. VII. 14.

† *Romans*. XI. 34.

Expedients, thus fondly devised, were themselves founded in Corruption, and Error. The Philosophers could not remove one *Vice*, but by replacing it with another; or raise one *Virtue*, but on the Ruins of another. Would they correct Irreligion and Impiety? they countenanced Superstition, and a polluted Worship. Would they banish Superstition? they introduced Atheism, and Impiety. Would they inspire Men with Sentiments of Magnanimity and Heroism, as they called it? They carried them beyond the Limit of created Beings; they would make them *independent* of the CREATOR, and attributing to the sole Powers of Nature the whole Agency of *Grace*, they sapped the Foundation of all Merit in the Creature, which is *Humility*, and left the Heart still more corrupt than they found it, that is, more full of Pride, Arrogance, and Independence of the CREATOR. We cannot read without Astonishment all the Absurdities, which the wisest of the *Stoics* delivered on this Head.

To such a depth of Misery did the Disobedience of the first guilty Man bring his whole Race; the wisest and most polished Nations, as well as the most unpolished and barbarous! *Socrates*, (what Pity, that any Objection can be made to his manner of Worship!) this extraordinary Man, I say, was so convinced of the weakness of human Reason, and the corruption of our Nature, that he concluded, "that the best Thing Men could do, was to wait patiently until some one should instruct

instruct them how they should comport themselves with propriety towards God, and Men.* And the Faithful among the Jewish People, who alone retained the express Belief and Worship of the *Living* God, seeing the many fatal Revolutions which their Nation had undergone, and yet their Spirit not perfectly subdued and reformed, sighed without intermission for Him *that was to come*, and *enlighten* the World. The *Fulness of Time*, which the Divine Wisdom alone could determine, was at length arrived, and this DESIRED OF ALL NATIONS appears, *full of Grace and Truth*.

Let us acknowledge with humble Thanksgiving the greatness of the Gift bestowed upon the Earth in his *Nativity*; and not presume further to *offend* by our Ingratitude, and irreverent Murmurs, and cavilling. Is there "Salvation in any other?" or "is there any other Name under Heaven given unto Men, in which we must be saved?" † The *Apostle* assures us, there is not. Let us then rejoice in his blessed Coming; and studious to turn to Advantage the happiness of our own Situation, let us rest confidently on God's holy Providence for the Wisdom and Justice of his Dispensations towards those, who may not yet have heard of his *Salvation*. There are yet a few Corners of the Earth, which have not. Many of those Nations, that were once enlightened, are again unhappily fallen off. "Let those

* *Plato in Alcib.*

† *Acts. IV. 12.*

“ those, who think that they stand, take heed lest they fall.”* *Faith* is a Gift, which God bestows without any preceding Merit on our Part, but which he has threatened to take away from the unworthy Holder, and transfer “ to a Nation bringing forth the Fruits thereof.”† It is melancholy to think, how many in our Days, who bear the Name of Christians, are Infidels in Principle, and no longer retain a Spark of *Faith*! Yet *Faith* and *Truth*, tho’ thus transferred from Nation to Nation, and from Individual to Individual, shall nevertheless remain always upon Earth in a *visible Society* of Men, to glorify the SON of GOD; whom all People, and Tribes, and Tongues shall, at least, in their turn, serve. The unbelief even of the *Jewish* People shall at length yield, and submit to his Law, so that when “ the Fulness of the *Gentiles* shall come in, all *Israel* shall be saved.”‡

WE shall conclude this Discourse with a few Reflections on the Circumstances of the SAVIOUR’S Birth. It is, like the whole subsequent series of his Life, a chequered Scene of *Humiliation* and *Grandeur*.

THE Prophet of the LORD had long since announced *Bethlehem*, as the Place of his *Nativity*: “ *Bethlehem* . . . out of thee shall *He* come forth unto me, that is to be the RULER in *Israel* §:”

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* I. Cor. X. 12.
† Rom. XI. 25. 26.

‡ Matt. XXI. 43.
§ Micha. V. 2.

and the Divine Wisdom brought about Matters so, that the Roman Emperor's Decree for enrolling the Names, and Families of all his Subjects, served also to execute the Lord's Design in bringing *Joseph* and *Mary* to *Bethlehem*, the native Place of *David*, their Predecessor. After a tedious Journey from *Nazareth* to this Town, they could not find a Place in the Inn, which was taken up before them by other Strangers. And must the *Mother* of *God* be refused entrance! Must she retire! But whither? To a cold *Stable*! Yes; for such was the Will of her Son now upon the point of making his Entry into the World. Blush, false Greatness of this World! Blush, you little Mortals! who, intoxicated with the Pomp, and *Pride of Life*, speak, and think of nothing but your stately Domes, and magnificent Apartments. Blush, fond Delicacy of the other Sex! that must be soothed with so much Assiduity, so many superfluous Attentions at the Birth of a poor Mortal. See here the Reverse of your most favourite Maxims established, and recommended by the Example of the SON of GOD; enforced, and ennobled in the Person of his *Virgin Mother*! Was this extreme Self-denial without a View to your Instruction?

BUT the SAVIOUR'S Humility had also its Reward. If he is born in a *Stable*, the *Angels* of *God* attend his *natal* Hour; and the Air resounds with the joyful Notes of a celestial Harmony. If he is laid down in a *Manger*; a Crowd
of

of innocent *Shepherds* fall prostrate before him, and by the simplicity of their Vows, and Adoration, sooth the rigours of his present Condition, and Comfort his suffering Infancy. If his *Coming* escapes the knowledge of the Great-ones in his Neighbourhood; a new and brilliant *Star* appears in the Heavens, to guide distant *Kings* to the Place of his *Nativity*. If he comes unknown to the greater Part of the *Jews*, who expected for their *MESSIAH* one like themselves, a Lover of the World, and its false Greatness; he is honoured in the midst of the *Temple* by the Venerable *Simeon*, who taking him respectfully in his Arms before all the People, and bathing his infant Body with Tears, breaks out into this tender and sublime Act of Thanksgiving: "Now thou sendest away thy Servant, O LORD! according to thy Word, in Peace: because mine Eyes have seen thy *Salvation*, which thou hast prepared before the Face of all *People*: a Light for the Revelation of the *Gentiles*, and the Glory of thy People of *Israel*."

VENERABLE old Man! but still more happy, to merit holding in thy trembling Hands, this sacred Pledge of the World's Reconciliation, and Safety! Happy *Shepherds*, to see with your own Eyes the final Accomplishment of every Figure, and Prophecy! Thrice happy *Virgin*, and *Mother*, to be Witness to these glorious Testimonies of thy SON's Power and Greatness!

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Reader

Reader: wouldst thou partake of her Joy? fix
thine Eyes upon *Bethlehem!* fix them on the
Temple! and like her, "keep all these Sayings
" in thy Heart." *

F I N I S.

ERRATA: Page 9, Line 3, after *opposite* add *and seemingly*. Page
12, Line 19, for *Profigasy*, read *Wickedness*.



